A STUDY ON ISSUES AND CONCERNS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

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INTRODUCTION:

Women Empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic and political strength of the women's to make sure of the equal right to woman, and to make them confident enough to claim their rights. Women are given a top place in India from the ancient time however they were not given empowerment to participate in all areas. They need to be strong, aware and alert every moment for their growth and development. Empowering women is the main motto of the development because on empowered women and child makes the bright future of ant nation.

Empowerment in its emancipatory meaning is a serious word one which brings up the question of personal agency, one that links action to needs, and one that results in making significant collective change. It is also a concept that does not merely concern personal identity but brings out a broader analysis of human rights and social justice. Empowerment includes control over resources like physical, human, intellectual, financial and over ideology like beliefs, values and attitudes.

Women empowerment literally means "to invest with power. In the context of women's empowerment the term has come to denote a woman's increased control over their own lives, bodies and environment". According to United Nations each country has "to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. While the world has achieved progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment under the Millennium Development Goals including equal access to primary education between girls and boys, women and girls continue to suffer discrimination and violence in every part of the world. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world".

The World Bank defines "empowerment as the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process in actions which both builds individual and collective assets and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organization and institutional context which govern the use of these assets".

Economist Bina Agarwal defines "empowerment as a process that enhances the ability of disadvantaged and powerless individuals or groups to challenge and change in their favour, existing power relationship that places them in subordinate economic, social and political position. Empowerment can manifest itself in acts of individual resistance as well as in group mobilization. Empowerment is multi-dimensional and refers to the expansion of freedom of choice and action in all spheres economic, political, social/cultural, personal and familiar to change the one's life".

Let us examine the areas so as to understand women empowerment issues in the true context of the society.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA:

Social empowerment is understood as the process of developing a sense of autonomy and self-confidence, and acting individually to change social relationships and the institutions. The era of Social empowerment of women in India, in the real sense, started after 1800 A.D. At that time Raja Ram Mohan Rai, Mahathma Jyothiro Phule, Iswar Vidaysagar and various social reformers laid stress on women education, prevention of child marriage, withdrawals of evil practice of sati, removal of polygamy, etc. the national movement and various reform movements paved the way for their liberation from the social evils and religious taboos.

After the independence of India, the Constitution of India, adopts in 1950, "not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. The Constitution further imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen to renounce practice derogatory to the dignity of women". The Indian Constitution also guarantees Fundamental Rights to all its citizens. The Preamble to the Constitution resolves to secure to all its citizens justice, social, economic and political, liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, equality of status and opportunity and to promote among them all, fraternity, assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation. There are many provisions in Indian Constitution which not only establish gender equality but also safeguard the rights and interests of women and also ensure empowerment and social justice to them.

As for the Indian constitution, the Government of India has also enacted various progressive legislative, measures intended to ensure equal rights, to counter social discrimination and various forms of violence and atrocities and to provide supports services especially to working women. Some of these are, The Marriage Act 1955, Hindu Adoptions Act 1956, Dowry Prohibition Act the Sati Prevention Act 1987, etc. The Hindu Marriage Act 1955 has determined age for marriage, provided for monogamy and guardianship of the mother and permitted the dissolution of marriage under specific circumstances. Under the Hindu Adoptions Maintenance Act 1956 an unmarried women, widow or divorce of sound mind can also take child in adoption. Similarly, the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 says that any person who gives takes or abets the giving of dowry shall be punished with imprisonment. Through this act the government was to prevent the discrimination of women in working areas.

EDUCATIONAL ASPECT:

Women Education plays a key role in the social development of the country. "Education has been regarded as the most significant instrument for changing Women's subjugated position in the society. It not only develops the personality and rationality of individuals, but qualifies them to fulfill certain economic, political and cultural functions and thereby improves their socio-economic status. One of the direct expectations from educational development in a society is the reduction in the inequality among individuals. The constitution of UNESCO also directs its efforts to achieve the idea of equality of educational opportunity without regard to race, sex or any distinction, economic or social". Education empowers women more effectively which would help to abolish gender inequality, develop their potentials, increase social and economic return, improve the quality of life, produce educated and healthy children and reduce fertility and mortality rates.

Education is milestone of empowering Women's participation in decision making in democracy, dynamic transformation of society and shaping the destiny of future generations because it enables them to respond to the challenges to confront their traditional role and change their life "Jawaharlal Nehru said to awaken the people; it is women who must be awaken; once she is on the move, the family movies. Swami Vivekananda said there is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is education which can do so by empowering women".

The National Policy of Education has emphasized the need of women education for their effective participation in social and economic activities. The NPE, 1986 has stated, "Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women". The national educational system will play positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women. The NPE 2001 has emphasized on education for:-

- Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential,

- The de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in political, economic, social, cultural and civil spheres,

- Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation,

- Equal access to women ti healthcare, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc..,

- Strengthening legal system aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women,

- Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women,

- Mainstreaming a gender perspectives in the development process,

- Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child,

- Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations,

POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT:

In Indian independence movement, women were visible and active as nationalists. "Gandhi, in particular, was instrumental in creating space for women through his nonviolence mode of protest. Gandhi's legendary salt march initially excluded women, but due to demands from women nationalist he later realized the power of women organizers at the local level". His inclusion of women, "however, was not located within a gender equality framework, but was a means to achieving a stronger and unified Indian state. The inclusion of women in the nationalist movement was also to debunk the British colonial assertion of needing to save the poor, vulnerable women of pre-independence India."

After the Indian independence, Women's empowerment and equal participation in political life is important at all levels of Indian society. Despite benefitting from reservations, women frequently experience obstacles when they participate in politics. However, to address women's aspirations for political agency we should explore the emerging opportunities, and not only the challenges. We should also keep in mind that there are multiple aspects of identity, and huge differences in the economic and political status of women, within India as in the rest of the world. 'Women' is not a homogenous category that can be defined merely by the need for aid or support.

The emergence of 'women's empowerment' as a policymaking goal reflects the agenda of the global women's movement to combat gender disparities and discrimination against women. Inclusion of women in the political sphere is thus seen as a powerful instrument for much-needed social change. This has given rise to an array of policies and programmes, in which the reservation scheme for women in local self-governing institutions (Panchayats) stands out as an ambitious social experiment in the inclusion of women in decision-making.

In 1993, India enacted constitutional reforms (the 73rd and 74th Amendments) making Local Self-Governing Institutions mandatory. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts of 1993 have provided 33 per cent reservation of seats for women in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities. This has undoubtedly laid a strong foundation for women's participation in politics and decisionmaking process at the grassroot level. The year 2001 was declared in India as the year for women's empowerment and the National Policy for Empowerment of Women (NPEW) was adopted in the country in the same year with the ultimate objective of ensuring women their rightful place in the society by empowering them 'as agents of socio-economic change and development'. Now-a-days, there is a lot of emphasis on the empowerment of women, improving their lot, and to bring their status at par with men.

The government has been continuously striving to provide institutional support to the nation's efforts for the empowerment of women. At the national level, the Department of Women and Child Development was set-up in 1985, to guide, co-ordinate and review the efforts of both governmental and non-governmental organizations for the advancement of women. The department has been implementing various schemes in order to address the issues relating to social and economic empowerment of women. Some of these are

The Women's Bill in April 2010, which gives 33.3% reservation for women in all levels of Indian politics, took 14 years after its introduction to finally pass by the Rajya Sabha (the upper house of parliament). It is yet to be passed by the Lok Sabha (the lower house of parliament). The reservation bill will ensure 181 out of the 543 seats at the Parliament level, and 1,370 seats out of the 4,109 seats at the State Assembly level. This is a historic move in the Indian political landscape, as currently women occupy less than 10% of seats in the national Parliament.

The Women's Bill will also significantly change the demographics of class and caste among women politicians in leadership positions in the Indian political structure. It will create a path for women from lower classes and castes (who are currently confined to local-level governance) to enter state and national level governments. In addition to the existing reservations for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, one third of the SC and ST candidates must be women. Other Backward Class (OBC) members are not included in the reservation due to the wide disagreement about who constitutes OBC and a lack of existing data on the OBC population. Snehalatha Panda justifies: "women's participation in political processes is important for strengthening democracy and for their struggle against marginalization, trivialization and oppression. Emergence of women as a strong group would change the prevailing political practices, the nature and content of debates in the legislature and women's issues can be taken care of from feminist perspective both in policy formulation and implementation. The opposition to the bill characterized the patriarchal attitude of the male parliamentarians and

crystallization of the caste and communalization of Indian politics. The long term consequences of the bill lay bare a reversal of the existing socio-political order which is most disconcerting for the opponents of the bill but such fear is unwarranted as long as the provision is limited to 33%. Both the ideological perspective of human rights and the necessity to widen the democratic space for practical reason demands inclusion of women".

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